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## Get the Lowdown on Chill for Food Safety:

### “Keep it Cool” – That’s the Rule: USDA

WASHINGTON, May 19, 2005 – “Keep it cool” – check your refrigerator temperature to keep bacteria away – that’s the message USDA is broadcasting as part of its national campaign to spread the word about ways to reduce cases of foodborne illness.

“Educating consumers about safe refrigerator temperatures will help continue the decline we have witnessed in illnesses caused by *Listeria*, and better protect public health,” said USDA Acting Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Merle Pierson.

The refrigerator temperature should be at 40 degrees F. or below. Recent studies show that the risk of listeriosis, caused by the bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes*, could be reduced by two-thirds if foods are chilled to a safe temperature.

#### Use an Appliance or Refrigerator Thermometer to Check the Temperature

Most people assume that the internal refrigerator temperature control dial is good enough. Only 30 percent of consumers have heard that they should use a separate tool -- a refrigerator thermometer -- to check the temperature and only 20 percent of consumers say they actually use one, according to a recent national study.

Relying on the “built-in” refrigerator temperature control dial is not effective. Instead, use a separate refrigerator thermometer to check the internal refrigerator temperature and help keep food safer. If the refrigerator thermometer shows a temperature that’s too high – above 40 degrees F. then adjust the refrigerator’s control dial. You can buy a refrigerator thermometer at many grocery, hardware or kitchen specialty stores.

The increased focus on refrigerator temperature grew out of response to the revised *Listeria monocytogenes* Risk Assessment released in 2003 by USDA and the Food and Drug Administration. The Risk Assessment showed that raising awareness of proper refrigeration temperatures could be highly effective in reducing foodborne illness.

Using a separate appliance or refrigerator thermometer is especially critical during power outages. Checking the temperature is the only way to determine if the refrigerator stayed cold enough to keep foods safe to eat or if they need to be discarded.

For spring and summer picnics, it is important to pack a refrigerator thermometer in your cooler. The ---

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food in the cooler should also be kept at 40 degrees F. or below. The rule for keeping food safe changes during warmer weather. While food can be kept out of the refrigerator or cooler for two hours during normal temperatures, if the weather reaches 90 degrees F. outside then food should be returned to a cooler or refrigerated after only one hour.

### **BAC Down!**

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is working with The Partnership for Food Safety Education, a non-profit organization that brings together government agencies, industry associations, consumer and public health groups to promote the **BAC Down!** Campaign. The **BAC Down!** Campaign encourages consumers to slow the growth of harmful bacteria in food by keeping refrigerator and cooler temperatures in the safe range – 40 degrees F. or below. Visit [www.fightbac.org](http://www.fightbac.org) for more tips.

If you have a question about meat, poultry or egg products then call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at 1-888-MPHotline or 1-888-674-6854, TTY: 1-800-256-7072.

You can call the year-round hotline Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 pm. EST (English or Spanish). Listen to timely recorded food safety messages at the same number 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>. E-mail questions can be answered by [MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov](mailto:MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov).



[www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

#### **Food Safety Questions? Ask Karen!**

FSIS' automated response system can provide  
food safety information 24/7